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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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A truly pleasant sensation is it to find direct value for one's study of the Classics from a book or pamphlet whose title seems to contain no suggestion of the Classics. This is true of a small book, entitled *The Principles of English Verse*, by Charlton M. Lewis (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1906. 75 cents). Professor Lewis, son of Charlton T. Lewis, the chief compiler of the *Lewis and Short (Harpers') Latin Dictionary*, is a member of the Department of English at Yale University. Years ago, when I was working hard on Plautine meters, in preparation for the work of a Seminar I was conducting, I read Professor Lewis's book, and found it helpful in many ways. With a review of the book, published in *The Evening Post*, November 17, 1906, I agree, especially in the regret that Professor Lewis is unwilling, in his treatment of English verse, to speak of feet. But with this and other matters I am not now concerned. I prefer to call attention to some sound remarks on the important subject of alliteration (130-137). I know of nothing saner and more helpful on this subject than Professor Lewis's discussion.

Having treated rime (125-130), he passes on to a second embellishment of verse, tone-color. This, he says (130), is given to verse by the preponderance of any particular sound or kind of sounds, whether vowel or consonant. "A preponderance of long a's or o's, for instance, gives a color very different from that of short e's and i's". But Professor Lewis has no patience with the doctrine that gutturals and sibilants express "amazement, affright, indignation, contempt", or, that the surd mutes (p, k, t) "help to convey the idea of littleness, delicacy, and sprightliness", or that the short vowel *i* is fitted to express "joy, gaiety, triviality, rapid movement, and physical littleness" (131-132). By examples from English poetry Professor Lewis shows that these statements are not true—at the least they are not universally true. On reading these statements I recalled at once my own perplexities in connection with certain statements about the effect of alliteration in Latin authors. Thus, in Munro's *Lucretius* 2.15, I had read that Lucretius's alliterations with *v* in particular were very effective. *V*, it is there said, "sometimes expresses pity as its sound well fits it to do . . . : or force and violence, because the words indicating such effects begin many of them with the letter: *vivida vis pervicit, venti vis verberat* . . . effects of living shunning and the like are expressed by it in Lucretius also".

Over against this I set Horace's *Solvitur acris hiemps grata vice veris et Favoni* (*Carmina* 1.4.1-2), with the suggestion of quiet in the latter part of the line following the portrayal of the hiss of the storm in the earlier words (for the latter compare the near-by *Iam satis terris nivis atque dirae grandinis misit pater*, *Carmina* 1.2.1-2). Now, to be sure, in Munro's words, more or less jumbled as they are, there is a hint of the truth, as finally brought home to me by Professor Lewis: that hint lies in the clause "because the words indicating such effects begin many of them with the letter" *v*, but so important a point as this, which gives in reality the explanation of alliteration whenever and wherever it occurs, should not have been tucked away in a subordinate clause, nor should it have been remembered by its own author only for a moment. Says Professor Lewis (133-135):

The fact is, of course, that all this analysis of sounds proceeds upon a false assumption. When you say *Titan* you mean something big, and when you say *tittle* you mean something small; but it is not the sound of either word that means bigness or littleness, it is the sense. If you put together a great many familiar consonants in one sentence, they will attract special attention to the words in which they occur, and the significance of those words, whatever it may be, is thereby intensified; but whether the words are "a team of little atomies" or "a triumphant terrible Titan", it is not the sound of the consonants that makes the significance. When Tennyson speaks of the shrill-edged shriek of a mother, his words suggest with peculiar vividness the idea of a shriek; but when you speak of stars that shyly shimmer, the same sounds only intensify the idea of shy shimmering.

Tone-color is most obvious in the device of alliteration, and the peculiar effects of alliteration are to be explained partly by another principle,—the principle of economy. It is ordinarily easier to utter the same sound twice over than to utter different sounds in close succession; the vocal organs can with less effort be made to assume a position recently abandoned than be forced into a wholly new one. A child a year old may say *Papa* and *Mama*, but must wait many months longer before he can say *Panama* or *Matapan*. But, on the other hand, if a sound is a difficult one to make, it may be easier to make it only once, and follow it up with easier sounds, than to repeat it over and over again. "Theophilus Thistlethwaite thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb" is profusely alliterative, but not easy. Thus it comes about that alliteration may give either pleasure or displeasure. Simple alliterative expressions in which the easier consonants are duplicated are agreeable; we have developed such an instinct for them that they seem beautiful; but duplications of difficult sounds are likely

not to give effects of grace and ease, but to suggest effort or ugliness.

The net result seems to be this. Alliteration (like other effects in tone-color) makes a group of words peculiarly prominent and effective, and intensifies the emotion suggested by their sense, whatever the sense may be; but if the sense is delicate and graceful it is especially helped by an easy alliteration, while if it is strenuous and impetuous it is somewhat more intensified by an uncouth and difficult one. In so far as sound-effects are cultivated without reference to sense, light alliterations and sensuous colors are sought after for their own sakes; but these sounds have no meaning of their own apart from the meanings of the words. When a poet writes a passage in which one tone predominates, we are not to imagine that he has chosen that tone with deliberate forethought. The tone has chosen itself, by its accidental presence in the words that were first and uppermost in his thought; and he has merely taken pains, in the arrangement of minor expletives and connectives, to select overtones that would accord with and so reinforce the fundamental tones. C. K.

### A LEE SHORE

(Caesar B. G. 4.28.3)

Dissatisfied with current interpretations of Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 4.28.3, I ventured over four years ago to put forward, in *The Classical Journal* 7.76-79, one of my own. The paper was directed in large part against a view set forth at considerable length by Mr. T. Rice Holmes in his *Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Caesar*. Mr. Holmes has done me the honor carefully to consider my discussion, but, as is clear from his reply, *The Classical Journal* 9.172-175, he has failed at several points to understand me. In his annotated edition of Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* complete (Oxford University Press, 1914), pages 442-446, he has reprinted, with a few excisions, his paper in *The Classical Journal*. Since without access to *The Classical Journal* no reader of Mr. Holmes's latest book would be able to determine just what my view of the passage is, and since Mr. Holmes's further exposition of his own theory has left me unconvinced, it has seemed to me worth while to discuss the passage anew.

Two questions confront us at the outset: (1) what meaning shall we attach to *deicerentur*? (2) what is the danger hinted at in *magno sui cum periculo*? The two are intimately related; upon our answer to the one will depend our answer to the other. The most natural view is that *deicerentur* pictures a sag to leeward, and that, since this was in the direction of land (*ad inferiorem partem insulae*), the danger obviously was that of striking and going to pieces. So far the editors are pretty uniformly agreed. Mr. Holmes, however, has a radically different view of the situation. Taking as his point of departure the general principle that a sailing vessel, caught by a gale, must either run before the wind or lie to, he assumes that the latter method of handling was followed in the case of those transports which were blown back to the starting-point, while in the case of the other group—that with which we are concerned—the former method was applied. He writes:

The ships which were swept down past the Foreland and the Dover cliffs, scudded before the north-easterly gale; and although they were evidently in no danger of being driven ashore, they were in great peril because only the most watchful steering could prevent them from broaching to: if a heavy sea struck the stern, it might swing the vessel round, and in a moment she would be overset and founder.

Mr. Holmes's answer, then, to our first question is that *deicerentur* pictures the ships scudding before the gale; and this necessitates his postulating in answer to the second that danger lay in the possibility of broaching to. According to his interpretation, what Caesar tells us is that

... they were getting close to Britain and were seen from the camp, when such a violent storm suddenly arose that none of them could keep their course, but some were carried back to the point from which they had started, while others were swept down in great peril toward the lower and more westerly part of the island.

But *deicerentur*, as I endeavored to show in my original discussion of the passage, will not admit of this interpretation. Such passages as Livy 21.49.6, 23.34.16 (where Weissenborn-Müller give as the equivalent of *deicitur* 'wird verschlagen') prove conclusively that *deici* when applied to ships refers, not to their scudding before a gale with plenty of sea-room, and so with no danger other than that of broaching to, but to their being swept out of their course down upon some danger point to leeward. If further evidence be required, one should consult the *Thesaurus*.

Again, Mr. Holmes's rendering of *magno sui cum periculo* by 'in great peril' is forced and unnatural. *Cum* in such phrases, as every one knows, expresses accompaniment, and the usual English equivalent is 'at' or 'to'. The latter fits here; i. e. it was the rapid drift of the transports in a south-westerly direction that was fraught with danger. To translate this phrase by 'in great peril' has every appearance of giving a twist to *cum* for the sake of making Caesar's words square with a preconceived notion on the part of the translator.

Yet, aside from all this, Mr. Holmes's theory breaks down on internal evidence. If two methods of procedure were open to the Gallic sailors—either to run before the wind or lie to—why, I ask, after pursuing the former method for a time, did they subsequently anchor? With plenty of sea-room (the assumption of this condition is essential to the theory which Mr. Holmes propounds), no real sailor, having once started under stress of weather to run his vessel before the wind, would ever think of casting anchor unless he had got into some sheltered position. And yet these Gauls, whose seamanship Mr. Holmes has no hesitancy in pronouncing skilful, are supposed by him suddenly to have let go anchor where, so far from being in the lee, their ships pitched and tumbled so heavily that the waves actually broke over them. This certainly was a blunder, and blunder number two if the ships had really been running before the wind, for by so doing the shipmasters had not only wasted time and effort but had put themselves